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An

Inaugural Dissertation

on

Menorrhagia

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Uterine Hemorrhage

By Montgomery Osborne
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Menorrhagia in its literal signification, means an excessive discharge of the Menses. It is considered excessive when it recurs oftener than once in four weeks, continues longer than usual, and is more abundant than it is with the same person at other times – This morbid condition to which the term Menorrhagia has been applied, Mr. Burns observes, may take place either along with a considerable frequency of pulse and febrile heat, sometimes preceded by chillness, or with languor, cold skin, and marks of torpor and debility of the arterial system.

"The fluid evacuated is of two kinds. The menstrual secretion increased in quantity which does not coagulate, but is sometimes preceded and succeeded by a slight discharge of brown-

ish serum and pure blood, which often forms coagula in the Vagina". All profuse discharges are considered now to be of the latter kind, and Menorrhagia, properly so called is an extremely rare disease - "Dr. Cullen says that when a larger flow of the Menses than usual has been preceded by headach, giddiness, or dyspnœa and has been ushered in by a cold stage, and is attended with much pain of the back and loins, with a frequent pulse, heat and thirst, it may then be considered as preternaturally large".

"When in consequence of these circumstances and the repetition of them, the face becomes pale, the pulse grows weak, an unusual debility is felt in exercise, the breathing is hurried by moderate exercise, when also the back becomes pained from any continuance in an

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erect posture, when the extremities become frequently cold, and when in the evening the feet appear affected with œdematous swelling; we may from these symptoms certainly conclude that the flow of the Menses has been immoderate, and has already induced a dangerous state of debility. — These effects are induced by an excessive flow of blood from the uterus, but I question much whether they are attendant on the catamenial Flux.

Menorrhagia, or Hemorrhagia Uteri is a disease incident to all ages, and ranks in society. Married women are much more subject to increased discharges than Virgins. The latter are seldom troubled with hemorrhagies from the womb. The higher class of women are much more frequently attacked than labouring women, and at the cessation of the Menses, many are frequently attacked with profuse discharges

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from the uterine vessels; which occur sometimes with the regularity of menstruation.

Of the Proximate Cause

The proximate cause of Menorrhagia is (according to the celebrated Cullen) the hemorrhagic efforts of the uterine vessels preternaturally increased; or a preternatural laxity of the extremities of the uterine vessels, the hemorrhagic efforts remaining in the natural state.

The exciting causes are the excessive use of spirituous liquors, and the too frequent participations in the dissipations of fashionable lifes; all causes which determine the blood to the uterus, such as violent straining of the whole body, violent shocks from falls, contusions on the lower belly, and violent passions of the mind; Local irritation, such as excess in venery, or ~~the~~ frequent copu-

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lation during the period of menstruation; frequent and tedious labours, and frequent pregnancy without nursing, often gives rise to excessive discharges and abortions, which often not only derange the uterine system but the general health; and lastly all causes which induce a laxity of the system, as a sedentary life, soft beds, low diet, constant watching and anxiety of mind.

Treatment

Menorrhagia, or simply an increased flow of the menstrual secretion, seldom comes under the notice of the Physician, and when it does, nothing more is necessary than to keep the patient at rest in a horizontal position, keeping the apartments cool and exhibiting some laxative medicine, as the Super-tartrite of Potash, and if attended by pain or irritation, an anodyne. But the peri-

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odical hemorrhagies, which occur with the regularity of menstruation, and the chronic dribbling of the blood from the uterine vessels, called Stillicidium, have sometimes baffled the exertions of the most skilful Practitioners. The active hemorrhagies, such as succeed to labours, shall first come under consideration; and I will now proceed to mention the remedies, which are considered the most efficacious in restraining the bleeding.

Of Venesection – This is the first and most important of our remedies, and if there is headach, dyspnœa or pain in the back, we should always report to it. It should, in truth always precede the use of other articles. The bowels should likewise be opened by some of the neutral salts.

Saccharum Saturni. At the head of the internal remedies, Professor Chapman places the Sugar of Lead, and observes, when it is properly used, it will prove most

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unquestionably, and most decidedly efficacious. Dr. Heberden says, if there is a specific in any disease, it is the Sugar of Lead in uterine hemorrhage. The manner in which it is administered is in combination with Opium. A pill composed of 2 or 3 grains of Saccharum Saturni and half a grain of Opium should be given every hour, or pro re nata. Professor Chapman has given it in alarming cases, as much as 60 grains in 24 hours.

Ipecacuanha - This is another and most valuable medicine in these cases. It is given in nauseating doses. The usual way of administering it is in combination with Opium in the same proportions that the Sugar of Lead and opium are used.

Super-sulphate of Alumine and Potash. This is a useful medicine, and an important auxiliary to other remedies. The most pleasant way of taking it is in the form of

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Whey. It is sometimes used as an injection, but I believe that they are hurtful generally in hemorrhagies of this kind.

Cold – Cold applied to the neighbouring parts, is of acknowledged efficacy. Cloths wrung out of the coldest water, and stuffed up the Vagina, are of great service in many cases. A plug of ice is occasionally resorted to with great advantage – Pouring cold water on the abdomen from some height is practised in this City, and with considerable benefit.

Opium – Professor Hamilton of Edinburgh, urges the most intrepid employment of Opium in periodical hemorrhagies. He has given as much as twelve grains of it in twenty-four hours, with singular advantage. (See Professor Chapman's note to Burns.) It has likewise been extravagantly extolled of late in London by some Gentleman of that City, who relies upon it altogether in hemorrhagies from the Uterus.

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Secale Cornutum – It may be a matter of astonishment that the Ergot, after it has been so much extolled in obstinate Amenorrhœa, should be recommended in an opposite state of things. Wm. Prescott suggested its use in hemorrhagies consequent to delivery. I have not had an opportunity of trying its use in those cases, but from its power of contracting the Uterus, and its putting a stop for three weeks to the bleeding from the Uterus of an old woman in the Alms-House which had been constant before, I am induced to think favourably of its use in hemorrhagies depending upon a debility of the uterine fibres.

The two cases of Stillicidium, which at particular times become profuse, I will now proceed to relate.

Case 1st

Mary McThinzie aged fifty, has

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for three months past, been affected with dribbling from the Uterus, which about once in four weeks is increased considerably. Nothing had been done for her, except giving a purgative now and then. I commenced with the Ergot in doses of five grains every hour, with a view of shutting up the mouths of the bleeding vessels by the contraction of the uterus. The first five grains occasioned a slight nausea, the second increased the sickness at Stomach and caused pain in the uterine region. At the proper time the third dose was given. In about Fifteen minutes afterwards she complained of most violent pain in the Uterus, said by her to be as severe as the pains of Parturition. They indeed were so distressing that I was under the necessity of giving her an anodyne. I called on her the following day, and found that the Uterus had contracted and the hemorrhage been checked. I was in hopes that the woman would never have

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been troubled again with the same complaint but in several days it returned to the same state as formerly.

Case 2nd

Mary O'Connor, a woman far advanced in life, has for the last six months, that is ever since she has ceased menstruating, been troubled with Stillicidium from the Uterus, which like that of the other woman, is at times profuse. She had been under a variety of treatment. The Sugar of Lead was given to her with the effect of diminishing the flow for a time. In one of her violent attacks, I gave the ergot in doses of fifteen grains for several days. She always complained, after taking the medicine a little while, of some cutting pains in the Regio uteri. The bleeding was stopped after taking the first dose, and there was not as the woman informed me, even a dribbling for three weeks, a longer time

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than she had been free from it, since she was first taken.

The foregoing cases, although they do not shew the efficacy of the Ergot in menorrhagia of this kind; are of importance inasmuch as they prove the power of the medicine in producing contraction of the Uterus, a property, which some practitioners deny its possessing.

Professor James made one trial with the ergot in those complaints, in which he states there was certainly a contraction of the Uterus, for the bleeding stopped as long as the pains were felt.

—Galls. A strong decoction of the galls is powerfully astringent, and has been used in the form of injection with the happiest consequences. It is more particularly beneficial in hemorrhagies of the chronic kind, or Stillicidium. Professor James mentioned a case in which the injection of galls

effected a permanent cure, where the ergot and many other articles had been resorted to without any benefit. The Professor of Midwifery ranks it among the first remedies in hemorrhagies of this kind.

Mercury. This is a late and I believe an entirely new remedy in chronic hemorrhagies from the Uterus. It has within a short time been introduced into practice by Dr. Joseph Klapp, one of the Physicians to the Philadelphia Alms-House. He, as far as I know, is entitled to the credit of having first used it in this complaint; and for this, as well as for many other innovations in the practice of medicine, we are much indebted to his talents and nice judgment.

Dr. Clark and some others of the East India practitioners, have recommended and used the Mercury to the extent of salivation, in hemorrhagies from the bowels

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with the happiest effects. Dr. Klapp, supposing that if it was useful in one hemorrhage, it would be of some benefit in another, was led to prescribe it in Menorrhagia of the chronic kind, and in not one single instance in which it has been fairly tried, has it failed in bringing about a perfect cure. I have myself witnessed the good effects of Mercury, used to the extent of ptyalism in the Alms. House Infirmary; and the results of those experiments, together with those which have occurred in Dr. Klapps private practice, induce me to believe it to be as certain a remedy for uterine hemorrhage as the peruvian bark is for Intermittent Fever. I do not wish to be understood from this, that I would resort to the Mercury, without first trying the efficacy of other more agreeable ~~and~~ atho' less efficacious remedies.

In administering mercury, our object is to excite the specific action of the

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medicine in a moderate degree. As soon as this is effected, the bleeding ceases. I have seen this effect in every instance in which mercury was used to the extent of ptyalism, and the hemorrhage never returned on the mouth's getting well, except in those persons who had some other disease of the Uterus connected with this. I shall mention one instance of this kind in the following pages. –

Dr. Klapp supposes the mercury acts by producing debility of the vessels about the throat and fauces, a debility much greater than that of the uterine vessels, the blood always looking for the weakest part, will of course tend to the mouth and in that way the uterus is relieved, and the disease perfectly cured. Its modus Operandi, is however a matter of little consequence, provided we attain the object for which it is administered. It may be

necessary to remark, before going any further, that before the medicine produces its specific effect on the system, it causes an increased flow of the discharge. We should therefore always remember to mention this to our patients, to prevent unnecessary alarm and want of confidence in the remedy.

The cases in which I witnessed its good effects, I shall now proceed to relate.

Case 1st

Mary More aged 32, says she has for several months laboured under this disagreeable disease – Astringents were given both externally and internally, without any permanent impression being made on the complaint. On the recommendation of Dr Klapp, Mercury was resorted to in the form of the blue pill. The patient took three a day untill the mouth became affected. The hemorrhage almost immediately ceased, and

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we had the pleasure of soon discharging her perfectly well.

Case 2nd

Mary Rochefaucault, aged forty, came into the Alms-House Infirmary with an extremely offensive discharge from the Uterus, intermixed with blood, and with some other of the symptoms of Cancer uteri. Believing it to be Cancer uteri, the combination of Cicuta and Opium was resorted to, in the proportion of two grains of the former to half a grain of the latter three times a day – After some time, this medicine was stopped, and the blue pill resorted to; one three times a day untill salivation was produced. The bleeding then ceased, and did not return as long as the mouth remained sore, – but as soon as her mouth became well, the bleeding returned. She then returned to

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the Opium and Cicuta, and likewise made use of an injection composed of ℥ss of the saturated Solution of Arsenic to a quart of water, and under this plan of treatment is getting better. This case proves what I have before stated, that if the hemorrhage is independent of other diseases, the medicine will in almost every instance effect a cure. Had this woman had no other complaint, I believe she would have got well under the use of this medicine

Case 3rd

To the politeness of Dr. Joseph Klapp I am indebted for the history of the following case. A young lady of eighteen years of age, soon after marriage, became very irregular in time of menstruation. At first she had a return of the Catamenia once every three weeks, then once in two weeks, and in a short time they never left her.

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She was put under the immediate care of one of the most celebrated practitioners of this City, who treated the disease with great judgment, and with the usual remedies. Astringent injections, the internal use of astringent articles and a recumbent posture, were all had recourse to, with only momentary benefit. The chalybeate Wine and Angustura Bark were, I believe, likewise employed. In consequence of indisposition or absence of the attending Physician, this patient came under the care of Dr. Klapp. He without hesitation, put her on the use of mercury, with a view to ptyalism. After her mouth became touched, she gradually recovered, and a disease of several years standing, was removed in a short time. She now enjoys good health, and has since become the mother of several children.

These three cases are all in which I witnessed its good effects, and these with

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the exception of the woman, who had some other affection of the uterus connected with it, were perfectly cured by the Mercury.

I now conclude with stating, that in the foregoing treatise, I have availed myself of the labours of several authors on this subject, and likewise of the Professors of this University, particularly of the Professors of Practice and Midwifery. What I have observed myself, I have related with as much frankness and clearness as lay in my power - Errors no doubt will be seen in every part of this dissertation; but from error no man is free. It is interwoven with our nature, and is coeval with humanity.

Whatever imperfections there are, they will no doubt be attributed to the proper source, and the indulgence which youth and inexperience can claim, will I am convinced, cheerfully be granted by the Professors of the University of Pennsylvania